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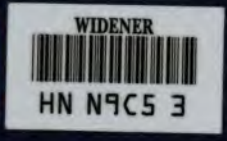

MEMORIAL SONNETS

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MEMORIAL SONNETS.

So brach ich wohl mit Grund in meinem Garten
Die Blumen aller Farben, aller Arten,
  Und bring 'sie dir, zu wildem Strausz gereihet;
Dir ist ja meine Lust, mein Hoffen, Leiden,
Mein Lieben, meine Treu, mein Ruhm, mein Neiden,
  Dir ist mein Leben, dir mein Tod geweihet.

UHLAND.

LONDON:

BELL AND DALDY.

1871.

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I.

WHEN 'mid the gloom and silence of the night
I start from troubled sleep, and look in vain
For the dear head that ne'er will rest again
Pillowed upon my shoulder—the dim light,
Low burning, cheats with shadowy forms my sight,
And many a strange delusion haunts my brain ;
But nought can fill the void or ease the pain,
Or give me back my love, my lost one bright.
Then doth it seem as if, with feet of lead,
Old Time were crawling through the weary hours,
Reft of his wings, and shorn of all his powers ;
As if the sun had now for ever fled
From heaven, and earth would ask no vernal showers,
No summer blooms, and all the world were dead !

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II.

YET who am I, that one poor, private grief
Should o'er the face of Nature cast a pall?
My lot is but the common lot of all,
And life is full of sorrows, long or brief.
Alas! to me this thought brings no relief!
The weight of woe doth not more lightly fall
On the crushed heart, because it may recall
Some kindred woe a brother deems the chief.
How can it heal my wounds, to know or tell
That other wounds are bleeding like to these,
And far and wide, wherever mortals dwell,
Amid their halls and temples, fields and trees,
A sigh is floating upon every breeze,
And every passing moment hears a knell?

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III.

ON the whole house hath fallen a heavy doom;
The servants only whisper when they meet:
Gone is the genial light, the natural heat,
And round us hangs the chill breath of the tomb.
My very dog wanders from room to room,
Whines at closed doors, and, crouching at my feet,
Doth oft with eager, piteous looks entreat
For the dear mistress to return, with whom
He ne'er grew tired of play. If he so pine,
Missing the gentle voice and soft caress,
What lasting, bitter anguish must be mine,
When every instant will the mind impress
With loss of something I can scarce define,
Yet do not therefore feel its absence less!

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IV.

FRIENDS proffer comfort, each in his own way,
With kind condolence, letter, message, talk—
Prescribe the healthful air, the pleasant walk,
And change of place to lure blind Care astray.
Thanks to them all! and on some future day,
Should life resume its reign, I will not balk
Their good intent. But now the withered stalk
Droops to the ground, and bears no promise gay.
My thoughts are with the dead—the calm, still face,
The silent lips which mine so oft have prest,
The cold, cold form, the pale limbs full of grace,
Clothed in pure white, sweet flowers upon her breast,
Deep hidden from the eyes of all her race,
And laid within the sheltering earth at rest.

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V.

AH, little ring! that clasped her finger round
Through many a changeful, many a happy year!
Poor hoop of gold! to me thou art more dear
Than all the wealth in California found.
Pledge of a union which no time can bound!
Emblem of love which outlives hope and fear!
I gazed upon the coffin and the bier,
And then on thee, till all my soul was drowned
In floods of tears!—Yet solace will I seek
In this mute symbol of true vows held fast,
Believing that such ties are not so weak
That Death can loose them. Even as in the past,
So in the future will their influence speak,
And, blest by Heaven, in Heaven itself will last.

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VI.

AND here's a lock of hair—bright, sunny brown,
As when it flowed in ripples to her knees,
Or taxed the strongest comb its threads to tease,
Or waved above her brows, youth's lambent crown;
And here's another, light as thistle-down,
Silvered by time, and thinned by fell disease,
When sleepless nights had robbed her couch of ease,
And the wan smile struggled with suffering's frown.
How different the two pictures! yet the same!
One loving soul revealed in varied guise!
So, when dissolves in dust this mortal frame,
And every old familiar image flies,
The spirit doth but a new vesture claim,
And lives unchanged, though all around it dies.

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VII.

AH, could I see her now! weird stories tell
How creeps the flesh, and how the blood runs cold,
In presence of a ghost. I am not bold
Beyond my fellows; yet I know full well,
That here, in this sad chamber where I dwell,
Might I the semblance of her form behold,
I should but rush with outstretched arms, to fold
The vision to my heart. Oh, for some spell
To pierce the veil that hides her from my view!
For oft, methinks, from yonder spirit land
She comes, in pity and devotion true,
By one lone bed to take her silent stand,
O'er it unseen to weep celestial dew,
And touch me with a soft, invisible hand.

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VIII.

THESE may be fancies, but God's love is sure!
No doubt can ever shake that holy trust.
Our Heavenly Father, merciful and just,
Hath sanctioned all our feelings deep and pure;
And though we have to wait and to endure,
Bending like reeds when o'er them sweeps the gust,
He will not leave us grovelling in the dust,
A prey to grief, without a hope of cure.
And His too are the dead. Thou, dearest wife!
Art safe in those paternal arms divine:
The pain is over now, and hushed the strife,
Gleams of a brighter morning round thee shine,
And straight before thee lies the nobler life,
Wherein my soul aspires to meet with thine.

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IX.

AND why not then hold converse as of yore?
If thy loved spirit still be lingering near,
My faintest tone will reach thee, no less clear
Than trumpet's note, or deep-mouthed cannon's roar.
And if thou dwell on too remote a shore
To catch a sound from this terrestrial sphere,
Good angels may the whispered message hear,
And bear it to thee as they homeward soar.
But, whether soon or late we thus unite,
I know thou thinkest of me where thou art;
And I in turn will every thought impart,
As though thou wert beside me day and night:
So shall I best unburthen my full heart,
And struggle out of darkness into light.

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X.

OH, Life and Time! how swiftly have they sped,
Since in one current rolled our years along,
With many a glad and many a mournful song!
It seems but yesterday that we were wed!
And near us looms that hour of anxious dread,
Which to an earlier season doth belong,
When duty called thee, and affection strong,
To watch with me o'er thy sick brother's bed.
Halls of the Temple! Place of high renown,
Once trod by warrior-knights in mailed array!
Fair garden, sheltered from the noisy town!
I see you still, and hear the fountain play
In those lone courts, where grim old buildings frown,
And London's mighty murmur dies away!

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XI.

FOR there we shared together joy and pain,
Now flushed with hope, and now by fear deprest,
While the fell Archer at his victim's breast
Oft aimed the shaft and drew the bow in vain ;
But when, at length, Life did the victory gain,
And Health returning soothed our cares to rest,
Love found a voice, and feelings were confest
Which long concealed within my heart had lain.
Oh, then the silent courts from slumber woke,
The buildings looked less old, the skies more free!
A sudden light upon the garden broke,
The fountain carolled with unwonted glee,
And, sweeping far away the mist and smoke,
The river flowed exulting tow'rds the sea!

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XII.

AND yet a time of doubt did intervene
Ere those dear lips a final answer gave ;
For woman's love, worth having, needs must crave
To ponder well the future, still unseen,
And judge of what may be by what hath been,
With self-examination calm and grave.
When next we met, 'twas by the foaming wave
And white sea-cliffs, amid the dingles green
Of Sussex, now with early wild-flowers gay.
One little church imbosomed in a wood,
Where sang the nightingale her song of May,
Witnessed our fond emotion, as we stood
In hawthorn shades, to hear the sweet bird's lay,
While Nature smiled assent, and all was good.

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XIII.

LONG-TREASURED letters! what magician's
power
Can so restore the past to memory's eye?
Here, as this faded riband I untie,
The old life comes again from hour to hour;
For oft, low-seated in some rustic bower,
Wouldst thou the fluent pen unwearied ply,
To tell of every cloud that flitted by,
The golden sunshine, or the balmy shower.
And to each other did we still convey
Tidings of all we thought, or felt, or knew,
The friends we saw, the books we read each day,
The dreams we dreamt, our fancies false or true—
Thou from the Channel with its changing hue,
I from the Thames beneath his mantle grey.

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XIV.

IT was not in a light, irreverent mood,
Such as too oft profanes the marriage-vow,
But with deep earnestness of heart and brow,
That we together at the altar stood.
The years had passed for evil and for good
O'er spirits weaned from many a folly now,
And pure, ennobling Passion could not bow
To wayward Fancy and her frolic brood.
So, when we plighted hand in hand our troth,
'Twas no mere empty form, no idle breath,
But a most sacred bond, which compasseth
For all the time to come the souls of both:
And still, through joy and sorrow, life and death,
Heaven is our witness we have kept our oath!

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XV.

THE bridal moon for us did truly make
A honeyed season, and rich memories leave.
How bright Winander looked one blushing eve!
How dear was Rydal for her poet's sake!
How smiled sweet Derwent, as we stooped to take
The lilies from her depths, and garlands weave!
Dunedin, to which ancient glories cleave,
Stirling, the Trossachs, Ellen's isle and lake,
Glencoe's wild pass, Iona's holy fane,
Ben-Nevis towering to the azure skies,
And Staffa's columns rising from the main—
We saw them all with Love's enchanted eyes!
Nor shall I know such happiness again,
Till (by God's grace) we meet in Paradise!

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XVI.

THROUGH all our converse, each was glad to find
New thoughts and feelings by the other lent.
Much of my life had been obscurely spent
Amid the common traffic of mankind;
But much with books, and in the world of mind,
Though daily in the crowded city pent:
While thine was marked by many an incident
Of foreign travel, with fine taste combined
For highest art, and natural beauties rare,
And what in social intercourse is best.
So, when our stores were mingled, we could share
Fruits of experience culled from either breast,
With food for contemplation sage and fair,
And springs of strong emotion unreprest.

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XVII.

BRIGHT was our pleasant home, o'er which the grace
Diffused by thee hung like a roseate haze,
And I was proud the housewife's skill to praise,
And yet in all the finer sense to trace.
On the wide earth there was no second place
So loved by me; and I would chide the days
For tedious length, and blame the dull delays
That kept me from its joys. One cherished face
Still at the window watched as I drew near,
And smiled a welcome to the chosen spot,
Where Peace, who makes the poorest cottage dear,
And sheds sweet flowers upon the humblest lot,
Dwelt with Content, whom cold winds hinder not
To reap a plenteous harvest all the year.

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XVIII.

AFFECTION, Constancy, the warp and woof
Of thy soul's texture, did thy life inspire.
No friend e'er saw thy wakeful kindness tire,
Or stand in peril or distress aloof;
No servant e'er dwelt long beneath thy roof
That did not serve thee more for love than hire;
There was no child but would thy kiss desire,
No horse but bore thee with light, willing hoof,
No dog but followed where thy footsteps led.
And all familiar names might safely woo
Thy sympathies, which else were widely spread:
My good old mother was thy mother too,
My sisters were as thine. No sacred thread
Of human fellowship didst thou undo.

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XIX

THERE came to us a memorable day
Of anxious hope, and then of pure delight,
When, like some fairy gift revealed to sight,
A gentle babe upon thy bosom lay.
Our beautiful! our first-born! who shall say
What floods of joy rushed o'er us in their might,
As we beheld our darling fresh and bright,
Clad in the promise of life's orient ray?
How fondly were thy wistful glances cast
On the small figure nestling 'neath thy care!
The little lady, with the silken hair
And soft blue eyes! All tender feelings past
Were now concentred in that infant fair,
And tiny fingers held our heart-strings fast.

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XX.

ALAS! that cruel Memory should be free
To paint another morning long ago!
The Devon rocks, the sunlight's early glow,
The silver line upon a leaden sea—
And in a lonely chamber thee and me
Bending o'er our pale child, while silent flow
Such bitter tears as only parents know,
When what they cherish most hath ceased to be!
Our pretty rose-bud! there it drooped and died.
How nursed, how tended, none but we can tell!
How missed and mourned through all the years beside,
The cold world recks not! Where that sorrow fell,
Its shadow resteth still, and must abide,
Till Time hath rung my spirit's passing-bell.

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XXI.

BUT thou hast found her! thou art with her now!
If human love may to yon world aspire,
A white-robed angel from the heavenly quire,
With amaranths twined about her shining brow,
Hath sprung to meet thee, and her name avow—
The name she bore on earth. Thou wilt admire
Those violet orbs bathed in celestial fire,
And that immortal bloom, to which must bow
All transient lights and perishable charms—
And yet, methinks, enough of likeness trace
In the transfigured form and radiant face,
Serenely pure, and free from life's alarms,
To know the long-lost daughter of thy race,
And take her full-grown beauty to thy arms!

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XXII.

OH, tell her how we prized her memory here,
Though of her presence all too soon bereft!
And clung to the sweet image she had left,
So that for her sake every child was dear!
We only saw the baby-vision near,
Untouched by change, and safe from loss or theft,
While her swift wings the empyrean cleft,
And rose in circling flight from sphere to sphere.
And she will tell how oft in realms above,
As dawned the spirit's consciousness of power,
She turned in fond remembrance to the hour
Of infant weakness—when, like brooding dove,
A mother's care watched o'er her, and the flower
Of life first opened to the smile of love.

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XXIII.

FOR through the ages God hath willed it so,
In His benign, eternal Fatherhood,
That human love should be the source of good,
From which the higher, holier love must flow.
With lavish hand the precious seed we throw,
Which oft seems wasted, or at random strewed,
But is with a prolific force endued,
And may to rich, abundant harvests grow.
All things are linked together! hopes and fears,
Whate'er we cherish, and whate'er we miss,
From the vague feelings of our childish years,
First wakened by a mother's voice or kiss,
To the last sigh, when all that earth endears
Melts in fruition of the heavenly bliss!

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XXIV.

THEN, dearest wife! the babe we laid asleep
By the sad moaning of the Devon wave—
For whom in after-days our hearts would crave
With many a yearning passionate and deep,
While thou wouldst to the hoarded cradle creep,
And with salt drops each elfin garment lave,
As pious anchoret in desert cave
Might o'er some sacred relic vigil keep—
Hath been, and is, and shall be still our own,
A spirit, to our spirits near allied,
Though parted from us by the rolling tide
Of death's dark river. Long she waited lone;
But now thy place once more is at her side,
And both expect me when my work is done.

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XXV.

SLOWLY it passed, as heavy rain-clouds pass,
The first great sorrow of our wedded lives,
Leaving behind a pang which still survives,
Like a dim speck on Memory's magic glass.
But soon the little grave was clothed with grass,
And on it year by year the daisy thrives,
And thus kind Mother Nature ever strives
With some fresh gift to leaven the dull mass
Of human suffering. We grew calm again,
Till happy days returned our hearts to cheer,
When the remembrance of a common pain
Made each to each more tender and more dear,
So that our very loss was turned to gain,
And stronger love new-born of grief and fear.

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XXVI.

YES! we had much of happiness together
In the sweet converse of a quiet home;
Or when brief leisure left us free to roam,
Far as the limit of our annual tether,
Amid the golden gorse and purple heather,
By moor, and mountain, and the wild sea-foam,
Culling fair pictures from the world's rich tome
Through every change of bright and stormy weather!
To us the rural life was full of joy,
The simple, outdoor life of field and wood,
Whose unpaid pleasures, free from base alloy,
Are genuine all, pure, peaceable, and good—
Music and colour to the ear and sight,
And to the mind refreshment and delight.

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XXVII.

BEAUTEOUS or grand did many a scene appear,
From Snowdon to the Alps, or where the waves
Boom round Tintagel's rocks and echoing caves;
But some few spots to us were doubly dear—
Our own familiar haunts from year to year,
Whose secret charm the memory still enslaves.
Chiefly, where sluggish Mole the meadow laves,
And on green slopes the Norbury beeches rear
Their giant boles; and Malvern's ferny glades,
With its long line of hills against the sky;
Lynton's deep combes, and craggy ramparts high,
And sparkling coves, fit bath for ocean-maids;
And that fair valley with its sylvan shades,
Where dwell kind friends beside the banks of Wye.

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XXVIII.

AND now remains for me this lasting boon,
Which fickle Fortune scarce can take away,
That wheresoe'er my footsteps chance to stray,
In near or distant places, late or soon—
At dewy morn, or 'mid the blaze of noon,
When leaves are thick, and summer gardens gay,
Or 'neath the autumn sunset's fiery ray,
Or the cold splendour of the wintry moon—
There's not a song of bird, or hum of bee,
Hoarse-sounding billow, gently murmuring rill,
Sigh of the breeze, or whisper in the tree,
Or sheep-bell tinkling from the grassy hill,
But has the power to make my bosom thrill
With fondest memories—for it tells of thee!

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XXIX.

AND when again I sit beside the fire,
Amongst my cherished books, in counsel sage
With the great spirits of each by-gone age,
Who noble thoughts and high resolves inspire—
Oft shall I lift my head, as to inquire
If other eyes bend with me o'er the page;
Dear eyes, that would my sympathies engage
For aught they found to love or to admire!
Much of the gorgeous realms of old romance,
Much of the world of poesy divine,
We viewed together, and thy kindling glance
Was ever ready to respond to mine;
While each would dark or doubtful line refer,
And seek the other for interpreter.

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XXX.

SOUND was thy judgment as thy taste was sure.
No gaudy tinsel, no mere tricks of style,
No pomp of words the simple to beguile
With hollow meanings veiled in phrase obscure,
Could e'er thy chaste and sober sense allure;
They only moved a gentle, pitying smile.
But all true thought, even though it lacked the file
Of polished art, all natural feelings pure,
Beauty, and tenderness, and hopes, and fears,
The gleams of fancy, reason's broader day,
The warmth of youth, the wisdom hived with years,
Met instant welcome. Wit's erratic play
Touched the light springs of laughter fresh and gay,
And soft compassion melted into tears.

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XXXI.

THY talk was rich and varied. Thou couldst range
Freely from theme to theme, and ever feel
A wakeful interest in the public weal,
And great events with all their ceaseless change.
Nothing to thee seemed wearisome or strange
That did with life and human passion deal,
Or gave the hope some human woe to heal
In lordly palace or in lowly grange.
Therefore, thy daily converse reached a height
Far, far above the dull and dreary line
Of petty cares, and fashions feminine,
Of paltry scandal, and ignoble spite—
Brimming the spirit's cup with generous wine,
And feeding full the mental appetite.

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XXXII.

YET wast thou perfect woman. No conceit
Of rival claims, which weaker minds perplex,
Could mar the natural instincts of thy sex,
Or lead thee in man's province to compete
With men. The sense of harmony complete,
Which filled thy soul with music, could not brook
The smallest discord in act, word, or look,
And shrank from aught unseemly or unmeet.
And though thy swift and keen intelligence
Was like a bright star in the clearest sky,
It did not dazzle with a glare intense,
But beamed with mellow radiance on the eye—
And its chief glory was to light and cheer
The home that to thy tender heart was dear.

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XXXIII.

AND were these gifts and graces all in vain?
And are they now as they had never been?
Gone, like a vapour vanished from the scene,
A shadow passing o'er a boundless plain?
I may not, must not, dare not so profane
Man's hope, God's mercy. Life would nothing mean
Save mockery, this fair world were but a screen
To hide a yawning gulf of grief and pain,
If thou couldst perish thus. It cannot be!
There's that within us, which for ever tells
Of a safe shore beyond the howling sea,
Where, rescued from the storm, each loved one dwells;
And Christian Faith confirms that truth to me,
Quenching my thirst from her celestial wells.

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XXXIV.

FROM the same fountain didst thou largely draw,
Though oft unconscious of its heavenly source;
For thy religion was no outward force,
But a deep, inward sense of sacred awe,
And love, which is fulfilling of the law,
Even where we know it not. Right little heed
Thou gavest to nice points of sect or creed,
Which seemed to thee like splitting of a straw.
But still to feel a Father's presence near
In all thy walks, and trust His care divine—
With grateful reverence, void of selfish fear,
To seek on earth to do His will benign,
And hold the humblest of His creatures dear—
This was thy worship, and this faith was thine!

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XXXV.

THEREFORE, I plant the Cross upon thy grave,
Not doubting that the Incarnate Lord, who wept
For every human woe, and still hath kept
The heart of flesh for those He died to save,
Will least of all reject the souls that gave
Pity and help to others. Each kind thought,
Each gentle word, each deed of mercy wrought
In silent abnegation pure and brave,
Will find with Him acceptance. Acts of love,
Known but to Him and to a suffering few,
Are woven in the robe of light above,
Which veils thy earthly frailties from His view,
And tears which thou hast dried are jewels set
To form in heaven thy starry coronet.

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XXXVI.

OH, may I live this life's brief future so,
As not to be ashamed to meet thee there!
Guarding my weak and wandering steps with prayer,
And memories of the sweet time long ago!
Henceforth, my business in the world below
Is to fulfil thy wishes, and to bear
The burden of my grief with conscience clear,
That I would have thee all my doings know.
To prize and cherish whatsoe'er was thine,
To pay thy legacies of love and care,
This be my duty, this delight be mine!
And while we thus each old affection share,
And seem to work together day by day,
Art thou not with me, even though far away?

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XXXVII.

IF once I dreamt of literary fame,
It was that in my dream I hoped to see
Those dear eyes flash with pride, or dance with glee,
When some fresh wreath was twined about my name.
All that is gone! and if I now could claim
A dweller on the glittering heights to be,
Where youthful Fancy soared with pinions free,
Cold were the glory, and the triumph tame!
Yet still I weave these verses, with intent
By slow degrees to shed a milder hue
O'er the deep sorrow, which my soul hath pent
In blackest gloom, hiding the heavenly blue;
And also—that some gentle hearts and true
May find in them thy fitting monument.

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XXXVIII.

THROUGH every change thy voice is in my ear!
It comes like music from a distant star,
Above the clash of arms, the din of war,
The groan of anguish, and the cry of fear!
When Gaul and Teuton meet in mid-career,
When rolls the battle's thunder from afar,
While Havoc's rampant steeds and fiery car
Sweep down the golden harvests of the year—
Though all the hope and promise of our time
May end in wrath and hatred's fierce increase,
Thy whisper tells me of a happier clime,
Where the loud storms of human passion cease,
And Love and Wisdom in their calm sublime
Keep the great sabbath of eternal peace!

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XXXIX.

OH, name revered among the best on earth!
Name of the sweetest saint that eyes have seen,
Thuringia's fair and gentle Landgravine,
Whose life was one pure poem from her birth—
Who fed and clothed her people in their dearth,
And in affliction walked the world serene,
To heal, and save, and bless. That name hath been
To me a household word of priceless worth!
And now 'tis safe from Time's destroying dart,
Preserved and treasured by the hand of Death,
Enshrined within the altar of the heart,
And canonized by Love's ethereal breath—
My saint! from whom I never more can part!
My spirit's bride! my own ELIZABETH!

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